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Message Text

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43
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05

AID-05 IO-10 ACDA-05 AGR-05 OMB-01 /102 W
---------- 121169
P 061108Z JAN 75
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6405

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0259

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, TH
SUBJECT: FIFTH DAY OF "GENERAL STRIKE"

REF: BANGKOK 0162

1. THE CROWD OF GENERAL STRIKE" SUPPORTERS DWINDLED TO APPROXIMATELY ONE THOUSAND DURING THE NIGHT AND GREW TODAY TO ABOUT FOUR THOUSAND. STRIKE LEADERS MADE SPEECHES WELL INTO THE NIGHT CALLING FOR CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE AND REITERATING LABOR DEMANDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT CANCEL PROJECTED PRICE HIKES FOR RICE AND SUGAR. THE CROWD WAS ORDERLY.

2. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY THAT THEY WOULD CONTINUE SELLING EXISTING STOCKS OF GOVERNMENT HELD REICE AT CURRENT PRICES. ALTHOUGH ESTIMATES OF THE SIZE OF STOCK PILE VARY, EVERYONE AGREES THIS TACTIC AMOUNTS TO A POSTPONEMENT OF THE PRICE INCREASE. ONE PARLIAMENTARIAN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO SELL RICE AT THE LOW PRICE INDEFINITLEY IN THE HOPE OF ENDING THE STRIKE, FINANCING ANY DEFICIT BETWEEN PRICES PAID FARMERS AND DOMESTIC RETAIL RICE PRICES OUT OF GOVERNMENT REVENUSE.
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3. TWO IMPROMPTU MEETINGS BETWEEN LABOR LEADERS AND THE PRIME MINISTER HAVE FOCUSED ATTENTION ON FINANCE MINISTER BUNCHU ROTCHANASATHIAN, THE LEADING PROPONENT OF THE PRICE INCREASE, WITHOUT BRINGING THE TWO SIDES CLOSER TO AGREEMENT. STRIKE LEADERS REMAIN DISTRUSTFUL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND FEAR EACH NEW SUMMONS BY THE PRIME MINISTER IS A TRAP.

4. IN ANOTHER ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS LABOR LEADERS HAVE WORKD OUT PLANS FOR PHASE THREE OF THE STRIKE, A DISRUPTION OF PUBLIC SERVICES. ONE UNION PRESIDENT TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE STRIKERS NOW HOPE TO BRING DOWN THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT AND EXPECT TO SEE HIM REPLACED BY GEN. KRIT SIWARA OR POL. GEN. PRASOET RUCHIRAWONG WITHIN THE PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK. IN A MORE CREDIBLE COMMENT HE INDICATED PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICE WOULD BE DISRUPTED AS EARLY AS WEDNESDAY AND THAT STRIKERS WERE WELL ARMED AND READY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST POLICE OR VOCATIONAL STUDENT GROUPS.

5. COMMENT: TUESDAY WAS ANOTHER DAY OF CONSOLIDATION AS BOTH SIDES REASSESS THEIR POSITIONS. ALTHOUGH STRIKE ORGANIZERS HAVE NOT REALIZED THEIR GOALS THEY ARE NOT READY TO GIVE UP. UNLESS STRIKE ORGANIZERS ARE GIVEN A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT STALEMATE DISRUPTION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES IS LIKELY ON JANUARY 7.

6. AT NIGHTFALL JANUARY 6 THE EMBASSY HAS A REPORT FROM POLICE SOURCES THAT STRIKE LEADERS ARE NEGOTIATING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND A SETTLEMENT INCLUDING THE CANCELLATION OF THE PROPOSED RICE PRICE INCREASE WAS IMMINENT. HOWEVER, LABOR HEADQUARTERS INDICATES NEGOTIATIONS ARE STILL IN PROGRESS.
WHITEHOUSE

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